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Letter dated 6 June 2011 from the Permanent Representative of Argentina to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Economic and Social Council

I have the honour to request that the attached report of the Latin America and the Caribbean regional preparatory meeting on the theme "Key education challenges in Latin America and the Caribbean: teachers, quality and equity" be circulated as a document of the Economic and Social Council for consideration at its 2011 substantive session, under item 2 (b) of the provisional agenda (see annex).

The meeting was held on 12 and 13 May 2011 in Buenos Aires in preparation for the annual ministerial review of the Economic and Social Council, which will focus on education. The regional preparatory meeting was a notable effort, and Argentina believes the report will be a valuable contribution to the discussions at the upcoming annual ministerial review in Geneva.

(*Signed*) Jorge **Argüello**
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Permanent Representative

* E/2011/100 and Corr.1.

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Annex to the letter dated 6 June 2011 from the Permanent Representative of Argentina to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Economic and Social Council

[Original: Spanish]

Report of the Latin America and the Caribbean regional preparatory meeting on the theme "Key education challenges in Latin America and the Caribbean: teachers, quality and equity" for the 2011 Economic and Social Council annual ministerial review

Summary

As part of the Economic and Social Council annual ministerial review, a regional preparatory meeting on the theme "Key education challenges in Latin America and the Caribbean: teachers, quality and equity" was held on 12 and 13 May 2011 in Buenos Aires, Argentina. The meeting was hosted by the Government of Argentina, in cooperation with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

The high-level event brought together ministers from the region, education professionals, development partners, civil society representatives and experts to identify integrated approaches and practical policies for the Economic and Social Council to promote in the context of the annual ministerial review, in particular on the role that education can play to contribute to achievement of all of the Millennium Development Goals.

The key messages that emerged from the debate include the following:

The education agenda in Latin America and the Caribbean

- Progress was made in: expansion and improvement of early childhood education; access to education; ensuring universal completion of the primary level; increased access to secondary education; reduction of gender gaps; reduction in illiteracy rates among the youngest segment of the population; increase in spending on education
- However: improvement of learning outcomes remains problematic and there are significant problems of inequality

New equity challenges: primary education completion; universal secondary education and strengthening lifelong learning for all

- There has been no reduction in the huge gaps in schooling in terms of access, achievement and learning as determined by families' socio-economic level, rural or urban origin and ethnicity
- This is a determining factor in the intergenerational reproduction of inequality

The quality of education, evaluation of results and improvement of teaching conditions and practices

- The region shows progress in access to education as well as in the structural conditions of the quality of its educational systems and institutions, but there has not been similar progress in improving the quality of students' learning
- International assessments of learning outcomes have shown that a large percentage of boys and girls are only acquiring a fraction of the required knowledge and skills
- Further efforts are needed to enhance the quality of education in the light of the new challenges and trends in the region

Strengthening of the teaching profession and incentives to improve teaching

- Policies for teachers can only be successful if there are frameworks for dialogue and agreements to make them viable
- Adequate consideration should be given to: recruitment and selection mechanisms for entering teacher training and the teaching profession; improving the quality of initial teacher training; developing accreditation mechanisms for training and professional development institutes and programmes that ensure a level of proficiency and the creation of teacher performance evaluation systems in agreement with teachers' organizations

Information and communications technology (ICT) in education

- There is a need for serious, systematic and rigorous efforts for monitoring and assessment of their use to help practical learning
- Access does not guarantee use of the technology but is only the first step, whereas solid and intensive training is the key factor determining how students make use of it

Convergence of the agendas of international agencies and governments as an enabling factor

Cooperation organizations must align their topics and strategic agendas to accelerate achievement of the goals of Education for All and the Millennium Development Goals by 2015 and to generate suitable conditions for agreements between and among the countries of the region on tasks that emerge in the post-2015 period.

I. Introduction

1. The main objective of the Latin American and Caribbean preparatory meeting for the Economic and Social Council annual ministerial review was to consider the progress made towards achieving the goals of the education agenda in the region and the related challenges, especially those that could be addressed through regional cooperation.

2. The participants in the meeting focused their attention on re-examining some specific aspects of education in the region and sharing the experiences of their countries and organizations. Lastly, a few issues were raised in connection with achieving consensus on a new education agenda for the post-2015 period.

3. The participating stakeholders — governments, civil society, United Nations organizations and the private sector — contributed to enriching the agenda for educational policy of each State in the region by sharing of experiences at the international level and promoting the participation of new actors and new partnerships to implement the education agenda.

The situation of Latin America and the Caribbean in relation to a quality education for all

4. During the first decade of the twenty-first century, the Latin American and Caribbean region went through a significant period of sustained economic growth. There were some positive signals regarding the improvement of the living conditions of the population and significant achievements in the expansion of education coverage and access. Nevertheless, social inequalities persisted in the form of complex structural problems, which have their roots in the geography and history of the region. This legacy serves to strengthen the differences with regard to completing primary and secondary education. Statistical evidence shows that the current educational gaps, which historically have been typical of the region, can be explained, to a greater or lesser extent, by economic, demographic, social, ethnic, cultural and other factors.

5. In that context, the region has made significant progress in expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children, as proposed by the first goal of Education for All.

6. In connection with the second Millennium Development Goal and the second goal of Education for All, which suggests ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls and those in difficult circumstances, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality, at the beginning of the 1990s the region had already almost achieved universal access to primary education. Despite this progress, the completion of the primary level was far from optimal. Two decades later, access to primary education has become more widespread in Latin America and the Caribbean and many countries have achieved or are close to achieving universal completion of that level for the age group between 15 and 19 years. However, in some countries the goal of universal completion still seems far on the horizon.

7. At the secondary level, considering the region as a whole, 3 of every 10 young people of school age are still excluded from secondary education and half of the

population who left school most recently (20 to 24 years) did not complete their secondary studies. Although the progress at this level has been significant, this is a first approximation which will help to assess the remaining difficulties for achieving the third goal of Education for All, which is to ensure that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programmes. The limits in development of technical and professional education in the region should also be considered part of the picture.

8. Furthermore, it has not been possible in Latin America and the Caribbean to transform the educational system into a powerful mechanism for equalizing opportunities. This is partly due to the fact that a significant factor for educational successes and returns is the environment and income of the households of origin. Even the progress made in recent decades with regard to coverage, access and progression through the various educational levels has led to stratification of learning and achievements in the educational systems. This inequality is most often also reflected in a marked segmentation and stratification of the quality and efficiency of the system of educational provision.

9. The sixth goal of Education for All proposes improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring the excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills. In this area, progress is more difficult. The levels of learning achieved by pupils may be a useful approach to the issue of quality of education. According to the results of the second regional comparative and explanatory study, students in Latin America show significant deficits in their learning. In the third grade, 36 and 50 of every 100 pupils have a low level in reading and mathematics, respectively. In the sixth grade, the situation is better, as only 19 and 23 of every 100 young people have a low level in reading and mathematics, respectively. The Programme for International Student Assessment points to similar problems in the same areas and a significant gap compared to the achievements of students aged 15 years in countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, although it should be noted that it is not possible to make a comparison between the two groups of countries without a context.

10. In relation to goal 3 of the Millennium Development Goals and the fifth goal of Education for All, which seeks to eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieve gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality, the information available on access rates and completion of education shows that the region has tended to close the gaps between men and women and that, in fact, more favourable indices are appearing for the female population, especially at the secondary level.

11. The greater degree of gender equality attained in Latin America and the Caribbean must not obscure the significant educational gaps that persist at other levels. Differences in educational careers among the school population based on area of residence and particularly on household income levels, clearly evince the inequalities that prevail in the region. It is sufficient to point out that four of every five young persons between the ages of 20 and 24 years who live in the 20 per cent of households earning the highest incomes finish secondary school; at the other end,

only one of every five young persons in that age group who are from the 20 per cent of households earning the lowest incomes have managed to do so.

12. Illiteracy is another instance of the inequalities that persist in the region, as well as of society's historical debt to a given segment of the population. While significant progress has been made in reducing illiteracy rates among the youth population, the problem is far from being resolved where the adult population is concerned. Nearly 40 million persons over the age of 15 in the region are still illiterate. It is worth recalling that goal 4 of the Education for All agenda calls for achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and facilitating equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.

13. Understanding education as a human right implies that the State is to be held responsible for guaranteeing that right and therefore, for financing education in the context of strengthening free public education for children of both genders. Financing for public education should guarantee all aspects of the right: availability, accessibility, adequacy, and adaptability.

14. Public social spending and spending on education in particular have maintained regular growth in the past decade, accounting for 4.7 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in the region overall. In some countries of the region, spending accounts for percentages of GDP comparable to those of members of OECD and to the values suggested by UNESCO. It is also worth highlighting that, during the last international crisis in late 2008, public resources for social spending did not decrease in most countries in the region, which mitigated the impact of the recession, preventing an increase in poverty and the loss of the progress made in the past decade.

15. The progressive nature of public spending on education is also worth highlighting. A fourth of that spending is invested in the poorest quintile, while the richest quintile receives a mere 16 per cent. Spending on education is more progressive at the primary level than at the secondary level.

16. The impact of the global economic slowdown is clearly an issue that casts a pall on the development agenda. Its potential effects are significant. Common sense would suggest that donors will have less funds and some Governments may be forced to redirect funds allocated for education to other areas. The private sector might also be deprived of capital and other resources necessary for work on the development agenda.

17. Teachers are strategic agents in education, owing to their direct contribution to the learning processes of children, adolescents and young persons, as well as to the establishment of quality institutional and educational frameworks and thus to overall improvement in the quality of education. Reflecting regional efforts, the student-to-teacher ratio in the region varies from country to country, although the regional ratio is lower than the global ratio. Nevertheless, this must be considered in the light of the constraints imposed in many countries of the region by the high proportion of the population living in rural areas. In addition, 80 per cent of primary school teachers and 73 per cent of secondary school teachers have a teaching qualification. However, there are again significant gaps between countries in the region.

18. Moreover, educational policies in the region have focused on conceiving strategies and implementing actions aimed at incorporating new ICT into education.

Efforts to improve computer density and improve connectivity in schools in the region have focused mainly on secondary education, and it is at this level of education in particular that progress is most discernible. Nevertheless, the gap between countries in the region and the most advanced countries remains considerable.

19. Incorporating ICT into the education system becomes particularly important in light of the role these technologies play in reducing the digital divide, given that most of the most economically and socially disadvantaged students in the school population can only gain access to these technologies through educational institutions.

II. Rapporteur for the regional preparatory meeting

A. Opening session and keynote address

20. The speakers at the opening session were: Alberto E. Sileoni, Minister of Education of Argentina; Gonzalo Gutiérrez Reinel, Ambassador, Vice-President of the Economic and Social Council; Thomas Stelzer, Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs, Department of Economic and Social Affairs; Pascual Gerstenfeld, Director, Buenos Aires and Montevideo Office, ECLAC; Jorge Sequeira, Director, Regional Bureau for Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (OREALC), UNESCO; and Andres Franco, Representative of Argentina, UNICEF.

21. Without exception, all speakers highlighted the importance of the items on the agenda, in the context of guaranteeing the exercise of the right to education in Latin America and the Caribbean. They congratulated and thanked the Government of Argentina for its commitment to the goals of Education for All and to a regional agenda based on joint efforts to guarantee the right to an education that supports humane, social and inclusive sustainable development.

B. Session 1: Review of the educational agenda of the Latin American and Caribbean region

22. During this session, the Minister of Education of Argentina, Alberto Sileoni, mentioned the central role of the State in dealing with matters relevant to national development and to forging the destiny of societies. He referred to the desirability of joining forces in a region that had shared values and was aware of the importance of working together towards common goals to achieve the social development of its peoples. He affirmed that while poverty was an obstacle, it was not a determining factor with regard to the exercise of rights. He pointed out that where poor material conditions were found, there must be high-quality teaching that enabled each student to develop his or her full potential. It was therefore necessary to maintain public investment in order to guarantee a quality education.

23. Anna Lucia D'Emilio, the UNICEF Regional Education Adviser for the Americas and Caribbean, emphasized the need for a public policy that reached those who were outside the education system or at risk of leaving it. She referred to the

former as the "excluded" and the latter as the "inadequately included", noting that the flows in the processes of exclusion are always characterized by poverty.

24. Jorge Sequeira, Director of the UNESCO Regional Bureau of Education for Latin America and the Caribbean, referred to the need to align the agendas and efforts of various entities and countries in the region in the area of education. He mentioned that it would be desirable to combine their efforts to provide substantial assistance to systems and mechanisms that supported the education systems in member States, offering a regional response to specific national interests. He said that providing technical assistance to those support systems would certainly enable entities in the region to achieve their goal of helping in the decision-making process.

25. Participants shared the belief that a review of the internationally agreed commitments in the area of education should take into account, in addition to the Millennium Development Goals, the goals of the Education for All initiative, current regional commitments and goals, and various United Nations and inter-American covenants and protocols that had been ratified by Latin American and Caribbean States and that upheld education as a fundamental human right, hence the need to guarantee that it was free,[1] universal and non-discriminatory.

C. Session 2: Key issues for educational progress in Latin America and the Caribbean: teachers and ICT in education

26. The second work session, entitled "Key issues for educational progress in Latin America and the Caribbean", considered two critical areas of education in two separate panels: (a) teachers and the various dimensions of their work (pre- and in-service training, accreditation, certification, minimum standards, evaluation, etc.); and (b) ICT as an educational tool in support of learning outcomes.

Teachers

27. The participants in the panel entitled "Teachers" focused on prospects for progress and improvement in teachers and the teaching profession in the Latin American and Caribbean region, taking into account their role and contribution to achieving the goals of Education for All by 2015, along with the elements that must remain on the educational agenda after 2015. The panellists were: Dennis Alonzo Mazariego, Minister of Education of Guatemala, who discussed the topic of teaching policies at the national level, keys and challenges; Tim Gopeesingh, Minister of Education of Trinidad and Tobago, who discussed key aspects of promoting teaching policies at the national level; Cristián Cox, Director of the Centre for Policy and Practice in Education and Director of the Graduate Program of the Education Department, Catholic University of Chile, who made a presentation

[1] The Regional Education Project for Latin America and the Caribbean (PRELAC) has maintained that "Truly free schooling is a pending task in the region, since in many cases parents are obliged to assume the obligations of the State through direct costs such as enrolment, indirect costs such as food and transportation, and through 'opportunity costs' incurred when children attend school rather than working and contributing to family income. Poor families dedicate a greater proportion of their income to educational costs than do the more fortunate" (Regional Bureau for Education in Latin American and the Caribbean (OREALC), UNESCO, *Quality education for all: a human rights issue*, background document for the second Intergovernmental Meeting of PRELAC, 2007:8).

on regional strategy for teachers and the profile of the teacher in Latin America and the Caribbean in the twenty-first century; and Jeffrey Puryear, Vice President for Social Policy, Inter-American Dialogue, and Co-Director, Program for the Promotion of Educational Reform in Latin America and the Caribbean (PREAL), who gave a presentation on the challenge of teaching in Latin America and the Caribbean. Mr. Tom Miller, Head of the Teachers and Transversal Themes Section, UNESCO Santiago, moderated the panel discussion.

ICTs in education

28. The panel discussion entitled "ICTs in education" focused on the contribution of ICT to educational development in the Latin American and Caribbean region, including progress made towards achieving the Education for All goals and practices, policies, and types of investment that were most suited to countries' needs in that area. The panellists were: Luis Garibaldi, National Director of Education of Uruguay, who gave a presentation on the use of information and communications technology in education, the Ceibal plan and related public policies and evaluation; Eugenio Severín, Senior Specialist, Education Division of the Inter-American Development Bank, who discussed the teaching and learning process as a moving target towards ICTs; Didier De Saint Pierre, Civil Engineer in Computer Science at the University of Chile and former Director of the Links Programme at the Technology and Education Centre of the Ministry of Education of Chile, gave a presentation on progress towards a quality education for the 21st century; and Daniela Trucco, Social Affairs Officer, Social Development Division, ECLAC, who gave a presentation on "ICTs for education in Latin America: risks and opportunities". Ms. Barbara Reynolds, Senior Education Adviser, UNICEF, moderated the panel discussion.

D. Session 3: Quality and equity in education

29. The session addressed the key topics of quality and equity in education, both of which have a profound effect on social and educational development in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Quality of Education

30. The purpose of the panel entitled "Quality of Education" was to discuss ways to improve the quality of education, which is seen as the main outstanding task in the region; to move towards a concept of comprehensive quality; and to examine whether learning outcomes are a sufficient benchmark for quality of education, or whether other aspects should be assessed.

31. Presentations were made by: Atilio Pizarro, Section Chief for Planning, Management, Monitoring and Evaluation/Coordinator of the Regional Information System, on "A comprehensive reference framework for quality of education"; Leonardo Garnier, Minister of Education of Costa Rica, on "Usefulness of international assessment and its application in the design of national public policies on education"; Eduardo Aragundi, Under-Secretary of Education Planning at the Ministry of Education of Argentina, on "Why assess the quality of education?"; and Jorge Manzi, Director of the MIDE measurement centre, Catholic University of Chile, on international assessments and education quality in Latin America and the

Caribbean. Elena Duro, Chief of Education, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Argentina, acted as moderator.

Equity in Education

32. The focus of the panel entitled "Equity in Education" was the principal area for intervention to tackle educational inequity in Latin America and the Caribbean. The panellists examined the contribution of education to reducing inequalities, and the innovative policies and national commitments deemed necessary in order to bridge education gaps in the region.

33. The panel comprised Rosa Hurtado, National Curriculum Director at the Ministry of Education of Ecuador, who spoke about "Consensus building as an imperative to reduce inequity and foster EFA progress"; Anna Lucia D'Emilio, Regional Adviser for the Americas and Caribbean, who spoke about "Discrimination and exclusion in LAC's education systems"; Martin Hopenhayn, Director of the Social Development Division, ECLAC, who spoke on "Education achievements and the intergenerational reproduction of inequality in the LAC region"; and Jaime Vallaure, Deputy Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean, World Food Programme, who gave a presentation entitled "The quality standard of the School Nutrition Programs". The panel was moderated by Nikhil Seth, Director of the Office for Economic and Social Council Support and Coordination, Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

III. Conclusions and recommendations

A. The education agenda in Latin America and the Caribbean: general considerations

34. The countries of Latin America and the Caribbean have made significant albeit uneven progress in realizing the Millennium Development Goals and the goals of the Education for All initiative.

35. Progress has been made in the following areas:

- Expansion and improvement of comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children, in accordance with the first goal of the Education for All initiative
- commitment to universal access to education, which has been moving forward since the early 1990s
- Ensuring universal completion of primary education, an objective that a significant number of countries have achieved or are close to achieving
- Increasing access to secondary education, although three out of every 10 persons of secondary school age in the region still do not have such access
- Reducing gender gaps: indicators are shifting in favour of girls, especially at the secondary level
- Reducing illiteracy rates among younger persons

- Increasing public social spending, in particular on education, to 4.7 per cent of GDP for the region as a whole

36. However, some important challenges remain:

- Difficulties have been encountered in improving learning outcomes: regional and international pupil assessments have highlighted similar problems in reading, mathematics and science, in addition to significant gaps in the progress achieved, which have yet to be addressed
- Inequality is the greatest remaining challenge in the region; beyond traditional income-based measurements, inequality should be understood as a violation of rights caused by lack of access to quality social services, particularly services that realize the right to health and education
- The fundamental role of education in reducing inequality, as well as the need to improve standards at every level, will be prominent in the post-2015 education agenda
- Public investment in education should be maintained, strengthened and managed over the coming years so that it becomes the principal guarantee of the right to education, particularly for the most vulnerable
- The challenges of equity and quality in the region therefore require a sustained commitment over time, which should not be neglected

B. New challenges with regard to equity: completion of primary education, universal secondary education and strengthening lifelong learning for all

37. Equity is an essential component of the quality of education. Despite general advances in education in the region, there has been no reduction in the huge gaps in schooling in terms of access, achievement and learning as determined by families' socio-economic level, rural or urban origin and ethnicity.

38. These are determining factors in the reproduction of inequalities across generations. Gaps in educational achievements are perpetuated throughout life in the form of job quality, access to social protection and social networks, participation in political life and incorporation in the information society. Individuals who have spent only a few years in school, and whose education was problematic in terms of relevance, pertinence, equity, efficiency and effectiveness, are unlikely to enjoy social inclusion and access to other rights in later years.

39. The right to education requires greater social and political commitment, not to mention mechanisms to facilitate the enforceability of that right. By raising awareness of education as a basic human right, the conditions can be put in place for the pro-equity reforms that the region needs.

40. Recommendations:

- Active and inclusive social policies to strengthen focus on and support for vulnerable populations at all levels of education
- A greater focus on the first years of life, from birth to three years of age, a period in which education should play a prominent role, and on ensuring

universal and timely access to pre-school education, as experience has shown that early schooling at those levels is a key factor in levelling out the educational pathways of different population groups in subsequent years of schooling

- Strengthen inclusive education and mainstreaming policies for pupils with special educational needs
- Design specific intercultural policies on indigenous peoples which include mechanisms to adapt curricula and teaching methodologies, with supporting policies developed in cooperation with the communities
- Develop flexible and dynamic ways to train and teach young persons and adults who are considering enrolling in training courses with a view to completing their primary and secondary education and joining the labour market
- Promote and/or consolidate social policies to support schooling, such as rental allowances conditional on school attendance, and complementary programmes including school meals and health care, all of which facilitate an early start to education and address various shortcomings in a timely manner
- Harmonize education policies with social policies through inter-agency coordination mechanisms for government agencies and the various civil society actor
- Design educational policies to foster equity by extending the school day at schools for pupils with limited means and by improving infrastructure and equipment, notably through the introduction of ICT, particularly in public State-run education

C. Quality of education, assessment of outcomes and improvement of teaching conditions and practices

41. Access to education in the region has improved, as have the structural conditions of education systems and institutions. However, there has been no corresponding progress in improving students' achievements. That issue is an ongoing and crucial challenge for the region, including for the post-2015 period, and requires far-reaching measures with no specific ceiling.

42. International assessments of learning outcomes have shown that a high percentage of children are acquiring only a fraction of the required knowledge and skills. Such low results are explained partly by socio-demographic and socio-economic factors that schools are unable to mitigate, and partly by dynamics intrinsic to the schools.

43. Assessments of learning outcomes do not shed light on all aspects of the quality of systems or educational institutions. They are, however, a guidance tool that should be interpreted in context with a critical understanding of what has been achieved and what is lacking.

44. The importance of this issue must be stressed, and progress must be made towards a concept of quality which adequately reflects the regional context and can pinpoint and develop the aspects that generally escape measurement and, in many

cases, are not measurable. This implies improving the available tools and developing new mechanisms which are sensitive to these other aspects, in order to generate knowledge about the state of the education systems.

45. The concept of quality of education must be further refined in the light of new challenges and trends in the region. The basis for that task should be the 2007 Buenos Aires Declaration, in which ministers affirmed that education is a public good and a fundamental human right, and defined quality in terms of equity, relevance, pertinence, efficiency and effectiveness.

46. Recommendations:

- Make progress in the development of a broader and more comprehensive concept of the quality of education that takes account of regional and local circumstances and allows for a better understanding of the sociocultural contexts in which the education systems are carrying out their day-to-day work
- Make progress towards a culture of evaluation in the region that is geared to changing and improving education; this will involve using and improving the existing evaluation mechanisms at the international and regional levels, promoting national evaluations and developing new instruments that are more sensitive to the diversity of each region and each country, but also backing them up with active policies that improve the conditions for teaching and learning
- Promote the evaluation of other types of learning that provide a quality education, such as education about peace, citizenship, democracy and cultural diversity; this will involve making progress with indicators of quality in education that are consistent with a broader understanding of the education situation in the region
- Develop a regional system for sharing information and studies relating to the quality of education and support research and the dissemination of its results to officials, teachers and communities

D. Strengthening the teaching profession and incentives to improve teaching

47. The quality of day-to-day teaching practices in schools depends on a number of factors, including training, working conditions and teachers' commitment to their work.

48. Policies for teachers can only be successful if there are frameworks for dialogue and agreements to make them viable. Careful consideration should be given to experiences that show greater potential to transform teaching practice and require a sustained commitment on the part of States, so as to avoid continuously changing the rules of the game as can sometimes be the case with a succession of reforms.

49. UNESCO and other international cooperation agencies have recently advocated conceptual frameworks and initiatives to improve teaching skills. Such initiatives show that adequate consideration should be given to recruitment methods for entry into teacher training, improving the quality of initial teacher training, developing accreditation mechanisms for training and professional development

institutions and programmes that ensure a level of proficiency and creating teacher performance evaluation systems in agreement with teachers' organizations

50. Recommendations:

(a) Policies that aim to improve initial teacher training should:

- Reinforce both pedagogical and disciplinary training
- Provide opportunities for early teaching practice
- Provide training in self-evaluation of classroom performance and reflection on one's own work
- Foster a professional ethos that promotes collaborative work, personal commitment and dialogue with the community
- Solid training for teaching in socially and/or culturally diverse contexts, in order to meet the national curriculum parameters while also fostering respect for and recognition of the specific characteristics of the various communities
- Development of accreditation mechanisms for institutions and programmes

(b) Policies to improve in-service teacher training and teaching practice should:

- Create opportunities for professional development for teachers based on peer-learning
- Provide working conditions that ensure fair remuneration, incentives to improve performance and the availability of time for collaborative work
- Improve training mechanisms with clear and comprehensive evaluation procedures that consider the ability to translate knowledge into good teaching practices and promote commitment to the job
- Promote a teaching career based on performance that makes it possible to progress up the career ladder and receive pay rises without leaving the classroom
- Develop guidelines for evaluation and standards — understood as objectives or minimum goals that guide and direct teaching practices — in collaboration with teachers, to contribute to the development of fairer and sufficiently contextualized accountability mechanisms

E. ICT in education: from policies on provision and connectivity to full incorporation into teaching practices

51. The use of ICT in education should help create better teaching conditions with a view to improving learning outcomes, which are understood in relation to both cognitive knowledge of the curriculum contents and the development of abilities and skills that are indispensable for the knowledge society and the aptitudes needed in the twenty-first century.

52. As countries are constantly innovating in the field of ICT, serious, systematic and rigorous efforts should be made to monitor and evaluate its use to support practical learning. Therefore, time and resources need to be set aside to consider which interventions have been successful and why, as well as their strategies, resources and impact.

53. In order to understand and address the complexities of the digital divide, we must recognize that ICT tools are being installed in a region that is structurally very unequal. Without direction from public policy, market penetration would only serve to exacerbate these differences and would even build capacities unevenly.

54. Merely having access to technology does not mean that people use it; that is just the first step, since we know that the frequency and method of exposure are determining factors in how students make use of it.

55. The design of ICT-related interventions should have the main — though not the only — goal of improving learning. Therefore, the other objectives of these interventions should be made clear, such as: closing the digital divide; increasing student motivation and participation; improving management and decision-making; reducing the administrative burden on teachers; improving competencies relating to work productivity; and expanding opportunities for learning that go beyond geographic boundaries.

56. Recommendations:

- Consider incorporating ICT tools into education as part of Government programmes and policies that include all the relevant variables going beyond the distribution of equipment and connectivity
- Promote the formation of alliances between the public and private sectors in order to have dynamic policies for providing, maintaining and updating infrastructure and equipment (hardware, generic software, connectivity)
- Include training in the pedagogical use of ICT tools in initial teacher training and in-service teacher training
- Create opportunities at school for students and their parents to access the Internet and other resources
- Ensure the availability of digital and non-digital educational resources that correspond to the curriculum
- Improve uses relating to system and school management: platforms and systems for teaching support, systems for course registration, follow-up, monitoring and evaluation of learning
- Connect the efforts of different countries and regional and international organizations in order to develop innovative teaching initiatives and research to generate knowledge and learn from experience

F. Convergence of the agendas of the international agencies and Governments as an enabling factor

57. There are many national, subregional and regional goals, projects and programmes in the region aimed towards promoting educational development.

Cooperation organizations should agree on themes and strategic agendas to speed up the achievement of the Education for All goals and the Millennium Development Goals by 2015 and to create conditions suitable for concluding agreements among themselves and with countries in the region, relating to the tasks emerging after 2015.

58. To speed up the achievement of the EFA goals and the Millennium Development Goals by 2015 and beyond, all agencies should make technical efforts to help and strengthen the support systems needed by educational systems in the region, including: schools, curricula, teachers, information and indicators; evaluation and monitoring; programmes and policies; alliances and coalitions; legislation, etc. This will benefit the various programmes and goals of all the agencies concerned and, above all, the educational progress of each and every country according to its needs.

59. Recommendations:

(a) The joint work of the agencies should be directed towards improving support systems for the education system by carrying out: situational analyses and assessments, designing and implementing programmes and policies, validating processes, establishing targeted incentives and subsidies, and monitoring and evaluation, among other activities;

(b) Technical assistance shall be carried out using an approach that takes into consideration:

- Contents and practices, so that curricula and teaching methods are closely aligned to the national and regional contexts of students, parents and communities, while considering the learning needs of the twenty-first century
- Teachers and their role in educational change, so that they will respond to the learning needs of students, through relevant in-service training and performance, in particular by using ICT as an innovative too;
- Schools, their context and environment, so that they can become centres for the community that can successfully address educational needs and emerging phenomena such as violent situations that may occur in schools, conflict resolution and disaster prevention and response
- Management and planning of educational systems, to make the most of resources and invest efficiently and with due accountability at all levels
- Social responsibility, to encourage the active participation of society and of new partners that are genuinely interested in educational progress, such as non-governmental organizations, the private sector, foundations and communities, unions and individuals, so that they can make a sustained contribution to improving education.